

# The Washington Post

## **Congress Has First Non-Theist**

By: Chris Cillizza, Alan Cooperman and Michael D. Shear  
Tuesday, March 13, 2007; Page A06

It is a year of religious firsts in Congress: the first Muslim, the first Buddhist (two of them, actually) and, as of yesterday, the first lawmaker to say publicly that he does not believe in any supreme being.

The Secular Coalition for America, an association of eight atheist and humanist groups, held a contest in December to identify the highest elected "non-theist" in the land. Yesterday, it announced the winner: Rep. Pete Stark (D-Calif.). Stark, 75, in his 18th term representing San Francisco's East Bay, issued a brief statement confirming that "I am a Unitarian who does not believe in a supreme being."

A number of other Unitarians, including John Adams and Adlai Stevenson, have served in Congress, and Thomas Brackett Reed, speaker of the House in the 1890s, called himself a freethinker. But they all claimed some belief in God, according to Fred Beuttler, deputy historian of the House of Representatives.

"As far as I know, Representative Stark is the first self-proclaimed non-theist," Beuttler said.

Freshman Rep. Keith Ellison (D-Minn.) is the first Muslim in Congress. Reps. Hank Johnson (D-Ga.) and Mazie Hirono (D-Hawaii) are the first Buddhists.